**************** Che Orisoner By... ANTHONY Of Zenda

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CHAPTER XL

HE terrible temptation which was assailing me will now be understood. I would so force Michael's hand that he must kill the king. I was in a position to bid him defiance and tighten my grasp on the crown-not for its own sake, but because the king of Ruritania was to wed the Princess Flavia. What of Sapt and Fritz? Ah, but a man cannot be held to write down in cold blood the wild and black thoughts that storm his brain when an uncontrolled passion has battered a breach for them. Yet, unless he sets up as a them. He is better employed, as it You know who that is?" humbly seems to me, in giving thanks that power to resist was vouchsafed to him than in fretting over wicked impulses which come unsought and extort an unwilling hospitality from the weakness of our nature.

It was a fine bright morning when I walked, unattended, to the princess' house, carrying a nosegay in my hand. ery attention that I paid her, while it | danger.

worshiped her. I found Fritz's inamorata, the Countess Helga, gathering blooms in the garden for her mis- it may be-I know not-that you will tress' wear and prevailed on her to hear strange things of the man who take mine in their place. The girl was rosy with happiness, for Fritz, in his speaks to you now. Let him be what turn, had not wasted his evening and he may and who he may, what say no dark shadow hung over his woo. You of the manner in which he has bow long it will be! ing save the hatred which the Duke of Strelsau was known to bear him.

"And that," she said, with a mis. to me, man to man. chievous smile, "your majesty has what is the first thing the princess does with them?"

We were talking on a broad terrace that ran along the back of the house, and a window above our heads stood the house."

rily, and Flavia herself looked out. the throne of Ruritania." I bared my head and bowed. She wore a white gown, and her hair was see it?" said he. loosely gathered in a knot. She kissed I was much moved, and the marshal's

her hand to me, crying: "Bring the king up, Helga; I'll give wrote my order.

him some coffee." The countess, with a gay glance, led finger is stiff still. the way and took me into Flavia's morning room. And, left alone, we had ventured to write more than a siggreeted one another as lovers are nature, and in spite of the pains I had ters before me. One was from Black not yet perfect in it. Michael-a most courteous request that she would honor him by spending a little from your ordinary handwriting. day at his castle of Zenda, as had been It is unfortunate, for it may lead to a her custom once a year in the sum- suspicion of forgery. mer, when the place and its gardens were in the height of their great beau- "what use are the guns of Strelsau if ty. I threw the letter down in dis- they can't assuage a little suspicion?" gust, and Flavia laughed at me. Then, growing grave again, she pointed to

"I don't know who that comes from." she said. "Read it."

I knew in a moment. There was no writing was the same as that which da," I replied, had told me of the snare in the summer house. It was Antoinette de Mau- cried, tugging at his white mustache.

I have no cause to love you [it ran]. but God forbid that you should fall into the power of the duke. Accept no invita-tions of his. Go nowhere without a large guard-a regiment is not too much to make you safe. Show this if you can to him who reigns in Streisau,

"Why doesn't it say 'the king?" asked Flavis, leaning over my shoulder will make her queen." so that the ripple of her hair played on my neck. "Is it a hoax?"

life, my queen," I said, "obey it to the and a few grumbles to utter. This was very letter. A regiment shall camp round your house today. See that you to be consulted beforehand, not informdo not go out unless well guarded."

rebellious.

"Yes, an order, madame-if you love

"Ah!" she cried. And I could not but kiss her. "You know who sent it?" she asked.

friend-snd, I fear, an unhappy woman. You must be ill Flavia, and unable to go to Zenda. Make your excuses as cold and formal as you like." "So you feel strong enough to anger

Michael?" she said, with a proud smile. "I'm strong enough for anything while you are safe," said I.

Soon I tore myself away from her, and then, without consulting Sapt, I took my way to the house of Marshal Strakencz. I had seen something of the old general, and I liked and trusted pleased when he could do everything, that my hands were to do. and jealousy played some part in his more work than Sapt and Fritz could Princess Flavia, as I had lifted mine. manage, for they must come with me what I loved most in all the world and and as they will hereafter appear. The

leasing the king with a quiet mind. loyal kindness. To some extent I took there was only one thing left to dohim into my confidence. I charged him the hardest, the most heartbreaking. with the care of the princess, looking As evening fell I drove through the him full and significantly in the face busy streets to Flavia's residence. I as I bade him let no one from her was recognized as I went and heartily cousin the duke approach her unless he himself were there and a dozen of his men with him.

shaking his gray head sadly. "I have with which my sweet lover received all were devotedly attached to the perknown better men than the duke do me. She had heard that the king was son of the king. They were told a part worse things than that for love." I could quite appreciate the remark,

but I said: "There's something beside love, marshal. Love's for the heart. Is there nothing my brother might like for his

a courier to you. If for three days thing!" none comes you will publish an order Perhaps the boar will hunt me," I which I will give you depriving Duke Michael of the governorship of Strelsau catch me." and appointing you in his place. You will declare a state of siege. Then you will send word to Michael that you danger?" demand an audience of the king. You

"I pray that you wrong nim, sire."

follow me? "Aye, sire."

"In twenty-four hours. If he does not produce the king"-I laid my hand on his knee-"then the king is dend. saint, he need not hate himself for and you will proclaim the next heir.

"The Princess Flavia." "And swear to me on your faith and God that you will stand by her to your I left you to go hunting?" death and all that reptile and seat her

"On my faith and honor and by the fear of God I swear it! And may Almighty God preserve your majesty, for Policy made excuses for love, and ev- I think that you go on an errand of

"I hope that no life more precion riveted my own chains, bound closer to than mine may be demanded," said I, me the people of the great city, who rising. Then I held out my hand to

borne himself as king in Streisau?" The old man, holding my hand, spoke

made of no moment. Yes, I will take bergs," said he, "and I have sen you the flowers. Shall I tell you, sire, And, happen what may, you have brave man-aye, and you have proved lant a lover as any that have been of

"Re that my epitaph," said I, "when "Madame!" cried the countess mer- the time comes that another sits or

> "God send a far day, and may I not worn face twitched. I sat down and

"I can hardly yet write," said I. "My Will be en

It was, in fact, the first time that I wont. Then the princess laid two let- taken to learn the king's hand I was

"Indeed, sire," he said, "it differs a

"Marshal," said I, with a laugh

"Yes, the duke, and some one else of not keep me from you." signature at all this time, but the hand- whom I have need and who is at Zen-

"I wish I could go with you!" he

"I'd like to strike a blow for you and your crown. "I leave you what is more than my

life and more than my crown," said I. "because you are the man I trust more than all others in Ruritania."

"I will deliver her to you safe and sound," said he, "and, failing that, I

We parted, and I returned to the palace and told Sapt and Fritz what I had "As you value life and more than done. Sapt had a few faults to find ed afterward. On the whole he ap-"An order, sire?" she asked, a little proved of my plans, and his spirits rose high as the hour of action drew nearer and nearer. Fritz, too, was more than Sapt did, for he was a lover, and his happiness hung in the scale. Yet how I envied him! For the trium "I guess," said I. "It is from a good phant issue which would crown him with happiness and unite him to his mistress, the success for which we were bound to hope and strive and struggle, meant to me sorrow more certain and greater than if I were doomed to fail. He understood something of through mine, saying:

"It's hard for you. Don't think I don't trust you. I know you have nothing but true thoughts in your heart." him. Sapt was less enthusiastic, but I ful that he could not see what my heart had learned by now that Sapt was best held, but only be witness to the deeds

views. As things were now, I had he had not dared to lift his eyes to the Our plans were now all made, even to Zenda, and I wanted a man to guard as we proceeded to carry them out, suffer me to set about my task of re- next morning we were to start on the hunting excursion. I had made all ar-The marshal received me with most rangements for being absent, and now cheered. I played my part, and made shift to look the happy lover. In spite of my depression I was almost amused "You may be right, sire," said be, at the coolness and delicate hauteur

> "I regret that we cannot amuse your majesty here in Strelsau," she said, tapping her foot lightly on the floor. "I would have offered you more enter-

"That for just a day or two afterafter last night-you might be happy without much gayety," and she turned pettishly from me as she added, "I further enlightened. Enough that the hope the boars will be more engross-

"I'm going after a very big boar," said I; and, because I could not help bred, brave and loyal they asked no it, I began to play with her hair, but more. They were ready to prove their

she moved her head away. "Are you offended with me?" I asked in feigned surprise, for I could not resist tormenting her a little. I had never seen her angry, and every fresh aspect of her was a delight to me.

True, you said last night that every "Marshal, I'm leaving Strelsau for a hour away from me was wasted. But and to bend all my energies to the task few days. Every evening I will send a very big boar-that's a different

She made no answer. "You are not touched even by that

Still she said nothing, and I, stealing round, found her eyes full of tears. "You weep for my danger?"

Then she spoke very low: "This is like what you used to be but not like the king-the king I-I have come to love!" With a sudden great groan I caught

her to my heart. "My darling," I cried, forgetting evhonor and by the fear of the living erything but her, "did you dream that "What then, Rudolf? Ah, you're not

going"-"Well, it is hunting. I go to seek Michael in his lair."

She had turned very pale. "So, you see, sweet, I was not so poor a lover as you thought me. I shall not be gone long."

"You will write to me, Rudolf?" I was weak, but I could not say a

word to stir suspicion in her. "I'll send you all my heart every day," said 1. "And you'll run no danger?"

"None that I need not." "And when will you be back? Ah,

"When shall I be back?" I repeated. "Yes, yes! Don't be long, dear; don't be long. I shan't sleep while you're

away. "I don't know when I shall be back," sald I.

"Soon, Rudolf, soon?" "God knows, my darling. But if

"Hush, hush!" and she pressed her lips to mine "If never," I whispered, "you must

take my place. You'll be the only one of the house then. You must reign and not weep for me.' For a moment she drew herself up

like a very queen. "Yes, I will!" she said. "I will reign

She paused and, sinking against me

again, wailed softly: "Come soon! Come soon!"

Carried away, I cried loudly: "As God lives, I-yes, I myself-will see you once more before I die!" "What do you mean?" she exclaimed with wondering eyes, but I had no answer for her, and she gazed at me

with her wondering eyes.

Shall a man not come back to the loveliest lady in all the wide world?"

said I. "A thousand Michaels should

She clung to me a little comforted. "You won't let Michael hurt you?" "No, sweetheart."

"Or keep you from me?" "No, sweetheart." "Nor any one else?"

And again I answered: "No, sweetheart."

Yet there was one-not Michaelwho if he lived must keep me from her and for whose life I was going forth to stake my own. And his figure-the lithe, buoyant figure I had met in the woods of Zenda; the dull, inert mass I had left in the cellar of the shooting lodge-seemed to rise, merely what I expected, for Sapt liked double shaped, before me and to come between us, thrusting itself in ever where she lay, pale, exhausted, fainting, in my arms and yet looking up at me with those eyes that bore such love as I have never seen, and haunt me ready, though he, poor fellow, risked now and will till the ground closes over me-and (who knows?) perhaps beyond.

> CHAPTER XII. BOUT five miles from Zenda,

on the opposite side from that on which the castle was situated, there lies a large tract of wood. It is rising ground, and in the center of the demesne, on the top of the hill, stands a fine modern chathis, for when we were alone (save for teau, the property of a distant kinsman old Sapt, who was smoking at the oth- of Fritz's, the Count Stanislas von Tarer end of the room) he passed his arm lenhelm. Count Stanislas himself was a student and a recluse. He seldom visited the house and had on Fritz's request very readily and courteously offered me its hospitality for myself and my party. This, then, was our destination, chosen ostensibly for the sake of the boar hunting (for the wood was carefully preserved, and boars, once common all over Ruritania, were still to be found there in considerable numbers), really because it brought us within striking distance of the Duke of Strelsau's more magnificent dwelling on the other side of the town. A large party of servants, with horses and luggage, started early in the morn ing. We followed at midday, traveling by train for thirty miles and then mounting our horses to ride the remaining distance to the chateau.

We were a gallant party. Besides Sapt and Fritz, I was accompanied by ten gentlemen. Every one of them had been carefully chosen and no less carefully sounded by my two friends, and leaving Strelsau on a hunting expedi- of the truth. The attempt on my life in the summer house was revealed to them as a spur to their loyalty and an indictment against Michael. They were also informed that a friend of the king's was suspected to be forcibly fainment, but I was foolish enough to copfined within the castle of Zenda.

king's main desire was to carry into will wait on us." effect certain steps against his treacherous brother, as to the precise nature of which they could not at present be king commanded their services and would rely on their devotion when occasion arose to call for it. Young, well

Thus the scene was shifted from Strelsau to the chateau of Tarlenheim and eastle of Zenda which frowned at "What right have I to be offended? us across the valley. I tried to shift my thoughts also, to forget my love, before me. It was to get the king out of the castle alive. Force was useless, In some trick lay the chance, and I suggested. "Perhaps, Flavia, he'll had already an lukling of what we must do. But I was terribly hampered by the publicity which attended my movements. Michael must know now of my expedition, and I knew Michael too well to suppose that his eyes would be blinded by the feint of

dutiful obedience and prayed for a

fight as the best and most exhibarating

mode of showing it.

the boar bunt. He would understand very well what the real quarry was. That, however, must be risked-that and all it might mean, for Sapt, no less than myself, recognized that the present state of things had become unendurable.

And there was one thing that I dared to calculate on-not, as I now know, without warrant. It was thisthat Black Michael would not believe that I meant well by the king. He could not appreciate-I will not say an honest man, for the thoughts of my own heart have been revealed-but a man acting honestly. He saw my opportunity as I had seen It, as Sept had seen it; he knew the princess-nay (and I declare that a sneaking sort of pity for him (avaded me), in his way he loved her. He would think that Sapt and Fritz could be bribed, so the bribe were large enough. Thinking thus, would be kill the king, my rival and my danger? Aye, verily, that he would, with as little compunction as he would kill a rat. But he would kill Rudolf Rassendyll first, if he could, and nothing but the certainty of being utterly damaged by the release of the king alive and his restoration to the throne would drive him to throw away the trump card which he held in reserve to balk the supposed game of the impudent Impostor Rassendyll. Musing on all this as I rode along, I took

Michael knew of my coming sure enough. I had not been in the house an hour when an imposing embassy arrived from him. He did not quite reach the impudence of sending my would be assassins, but he sent the other three of his famous Six-the I will do my part. Though all my life three Ruritanian gentlemen, Lauenwill be empty and my heart dead, yet gram, Kraiseen and Ruger will be empty and my heart dead, yet A fine, strapping trio they were, splendidly horsed and admirably equipped. Young Rupert, who looked a dare levil and could not have been more than twenty-two or twenty-three, took the lead and made us the neatest speech, wherein my devoted subject and loving brother, Michael of Strelsau, prayed me to pardon him for not paying his addresses in person and, further, for not putting his castle at "Marshal," said I, with a language with the smalled grimly and took the paper.

I dared not ask her to forget. She would have found it an insult. I could not tell her then who and what I was. She was weeping, and I had but to said and also in a very infectious state. these apparent derelictions being that So declared young Rupert with an in solent smile on his curling upper lip and a toss of his thick hair-he was a handsome villain, and the gossip ran that many a lady had troubled her

heart for him already. "If my brother has scarlet fever." said I, "he is nearer my complexion king has been here." than he is wont to be, my lord. I

trust he does not suffer." "He is able to attend to his affairs,

"I hope all beneath your roof are not sick. What of my good friends De Gautet, Bersonin and Detchard? I

heard the last had suffered a hurt." Lauengram and Krafstein looked glum and uneasy, but young Rupert's smile grew broader

"He hopes soon to find a medicine for it, sire" he answered. And I burst out laughing, for I knew

what medicine Detchard longed for. It is called revenge. "You will dine with us, gentlemen?"

Young Rupert was profuse in apolo gles. They had urgent duties at the

castle. "Then," said I, with a wave of my hand, "to our next meeting, gentlemen.

May it make us better acquainted." "We will pray your majesty for an early opportunity," quoth Rupert airily. And he strode past Sapt with such jeering scorn on his face that I saw the old fellow clinch his fist and scowl

black as night. For my part, if a man must needs be a knave I would have him a debo nair knave, and I liked Rupert Hentzau better than his long faced, close eyed companions. It makes your sin no worse, as I conceive, to do it a la mode and stylishly.

Now, it was a curious thing that on this first night, instead of eating the excellent dinner my cooks had prepared for me, I must needs leave my gentlemen to eat it alone, under Sapt's presiding care, and ride myself with Fritz to the town of Zenda and a certain little inn that I knew of. There was little danger in the excursion. The evenings were long and light, and the road this side of Zenda well frequent-So off we rode, with a groom be hind us. I muffled myself up in a big "Fritz," said I as we entered the

town, "there's an uncommonly pretty girl at this inn." "How do you know?" he asked.

"Because I've been there," said I. "Since"- he began. "No. Before," said I.

"But they'll recognize you?"

"Well, of course they will. Now don't argue, my good fellow, but listen to me. We're two gentlemen of the king's household, and one of us has a toothache. The other will order a private room and dinner and, further, a bottle of the best wine for the sufferer. And

His rescue was one of the objects of If he be as clever a fellow as I take "Well, what?" I asked, leaning over the expedition; but, it was added, the him for, the pretty girl and no other

"What if she won't?" objected Fritz. "My dear Fritz," said I, "if she won't

for you, she will for me.' We were at the inn. Nothing of me but my eyes was visible as I walked in. The landlady received us. Two minutes later my little friend (ever, fear, on the lookout for such guests as might prove amusing) made her appearance. Dinner and the wine were ordered. I sat down in the private room. A miaute later Fritz came in. "She's coming," he said.

"If she were not, I should have to doubt the Countess Helga's taste." She came in. I gave her time to set the wine down. I didn't want it drop-

ped. Fritz poured out a glass and gave it to me. "Is the gentleman in great pain?" the

girl asked sympathetically. "The gentleman is no worse than when he saw you last," said I, throwing away my cloak. She started with a little shriek. Then

she cried: "It was the king, then! I told mother so the minute I saw his picture. Oh, Bir, forgive me?

"Faith, you gave me nothing that burt much," said I. "But the things we said." "I forgive them for the thing you

did."

"I must go and tell mother." "Stop," said I, assuming a graver air. "We are not here for sport tonight. Go and bring dinner, and not a word

of the king being here." She came back in a few minutes ooking grave, yet very curious. "Well, how is Johann?" I asked, be

"Oh, that fellow, sir-my lord king, "'Sir' will do, please. How is he?" "We hardly see him now, sir?"

"And why not?" "I told him he came too often, sir," sald she, tossing her head. "So he sulks and stays away?"

"Yes, sir," "But you could bring him back?" I suggested, with a smile

"Perhaps I could," said she. "I know your powers, you see," said I, and she blushed with pleasure. "It's not only that, sir, that keeps him away. He's very busy at the cas-"But there's no shooting on now." "No, sir; but he's in charge of the

"Johann turned housemaid?" The little girl was brimming over

"Well, there are no others," said she. "There's not a woman there-not as a servant, I mean. They do say-but perhaps it's false, sir."

"Let's have it for what it's worth," sald I. "Indeed, I'm ashamed to tell you,

"On, see, I'm looking at the ceiling." "They do say there is a lady there, sir, but except for her there's not a woman in the place. And Johann has

to wait on the gentlemen." "Poor Johann! He must be overworked. Yet I'm sure he could find half an hour to come and see you."

"It would depend on the time, sir, perhaps."

"Do you love him?" I asked. "Not I, sir."

"And you wish to serve the king?" "Then tell him to meet you at the second milestone out of Zenda tomor-

"Do you mean him harm, sir?" "Not if he will do as I bid him. But I think I've told you enough, my pretty maid. See that you do as I bld you. And, mind, no one is to know that the

I spoke a little sternly, for there is seldom harm in infusing a little fear into a woman's liking for you, and I softened the effect by giving her a handsome present. Then we dined, and, wrapping my cloak about my face. with Fritz leading the way, we went

downstairs to our horses again. It was but half past 8 and hardly yet dark. The streets were full for such a quiet little place, and I could see that gossip was all agog. With the king on one side and the duke on the other, Zenda felt itself the center of all Ruritania. We jogged gently through the town, but set our horses to a sharper

pace when we reached the open coun-"You want to catch this fellow Johann?" asked Fritz.

"Aye, and I fancy I've baited the hook right. Our little Delilah will



Fritz, to have no women in a house. though brother Michael shows some wisdom there. If you want safety, you must have none within fifty miles." "None nearer than Strelsau, for instance," said poor Fritz, with a lovelorn sigh.

We reached the avenue of the cha teau and were soon at the house. the hoofs of our horses sounded on the gravel Sapt rushed out to meet us. "Thank God, you're safe!" he cried.

"Have you seen anything of them?" "Of whom?" I asked, dismounting. He drew us aside that the groo might not bear.

ride about here unless with helf a dozen of us. You know among our men a tail young fellow, Bernenstein

by name?" I knew him. He was a fine, strapand of light complexion.

"He ites in his room upstairs with a bullet through his arm." "The deuce he does!"

"After dinner he strolled out alone and went a mile or so into the wood, and as he walked he thought he saw three men among the trees, and one leveled a gun at him. He had no weap- him to be brought in at once. Sapt on, and he started at a run back toward the house, but one of them fired, by my bedside. He was sullen and and he was hit and had much ado to afraid, but, to say truth, after young reach nere before he fainted. By good Rupert's exploit we also had our fears, the house."

He paused and added:

"Lad, the bullet was meant for you." "It is very likely," said I, "and it's were bound, but that I would not suffirst blood to brother Michael." "I wonder which three it was," said

night for no idle purpose, as you shall observed and paid, so that he lives hear. But there's one thing in my now in prosperity (though where I

mind." "What's that?" he asked.

"Why, this," I answered-"that I shall ill requite the very great bonors Ruritania has done me if I depart from it leaving one of those Six alive." And Sapt shook my hand on that,

CHAPTER XIII,

N the morning of the day after

that on which I swore my certain orders and then rested in greater contentment than I had known for some time. I was at work, and work, though it cannot cure love, is yet a narcotic to it. So that Sapt, who grew feverish, marveled to see me sprawling in an armchair in the sunshine, listening to one of my friends who sang me amorous songs in a mellow voice and induced in me a pleas ing melancholy. Thus was I engaged when young Rupert Hentzau, who fear ed neither man nor devil, and rode through the demesne, where every tree might hide a marksman for all he knew, as though it had been the park at Strelsan, cantered up to where I lay, bowing with buriesque deference and der to deliver a message from the than a wicked and had acted through-Duke of Strelsau. I made all with- out this matter more from fear of the

"The king is in love, it seems." "Not with life, my lord," said I, smilling.

"It is well," he rejoined. "Come, we are alone. Rassendyll"-

I rose to a sitting posture. "What's the matter?" he asked. "I was about to call one of my gentlemen to bring your borse, my lord. If you do not know how to address the king, my brother must find another

"Why keep up the farce?" he asked, negligently dusting his boot with his

"Because it is not finished yet, and meanwhile I'll choose my own name." "Oh, so be it! Yet I spoke in love for you, for indeed you are a man after my own heart,"

"Saving my poor honesty," said I, "maybe I am. But that I keep faith with men and honor with women, maybe I am, my lord."

He darted a glance at me, a glance of anger. "Is your mother dead?" said I. "Aye, she's dead." "She may thank God," said I, and I

heard him curse me softly. "Well, what's the message?" I continued, I had touched him in the raw, for all the world knew he had broken his mother's heart, and his airy manner

was gone for the moment, "The duke offers you more than I would," he growled. "A halter for you, sire, was my suggestion. But he offers you safe conduct across the frontier and a million crowns."

"I prefer your offer, my lord, if I am bound to one." "You refuse?"

"I told Michael you would." And the villain, his temper restored, gave me the sunnlest of smiles. "The fact is, between ourselves," he continued. "Michael doesn't understand a gentleman."

"And you?" I asked. "I do," he said. "Well, well, the halter be it." "I'm sorry you won't live to see it." I observed.

I began to laugh.

"The k"-

fainted.

"Has his majesty done me the honor to fasten a particular quarrel on me?" "I would you were a few years older, though.'

"Ob, God gives years, but the devil gives increase," laughed he. "I can "How is your prisoner?" I asked.

"Your prisoner." "I forgot your wishes, sire. Well, he is alive." He rose to his feet. I imitated him. Then came the most audacious thing I have known in my life. My friends were some thirty yards away. Rupert horse and dismissed the fellow with a crown. The horse stood near. I stood still, suspecting nothing. Rupert made

"Shake hands," he said. I bowed, and did as he had foreseen -I put my hands behind me. Quicker than thought his left hand darted out at me and a small dagger flashed in the air. He struck me in the left shoulder. Had I not swerved it had been Without touching the stirrup he leaped and I sank into my chair, bleeding pro-

there lay unconscious or half conscious plied to an armed attack, but if susfor many hours, for it was night when

friends surrounded me, and then I

"Lad," he said to me, "you must not cheer, saying that my wound would soon heal and that meanwhile all had gone well, for Johann, the keeper, had fallen into the snare we had laid for

him and was even now in the house. ping young man, almost of my height, Fritz, "that I fancy he's not altogether "And the queer thing is," pursued sorry to find himself here. He seems to think that when Black Michael bas brought off his coup, witnesses of how it was effected-saving, of course, the Bix themselves-will not be at a pre-

This idea argued a shrewdness in our captive which led me to build luck they feared to pursue him nearer and if he got as far as possible from Sapt's formidable six shooter Sapt kept him as far as he could from me. Moreover, when he came in his hands

fer. I need not stay to recount the safeguards and rewards we promised the "Well, Sapt," I said, "I went out to- fellow-all of which were honorably may not mention)-ited we were the



With a cry I staggered back.

more free inasmuch as we soon learncraving private speech with me in or- ed that he was rather a weak man draw, and then he said, seating himself | duke and of his own brother Max than for any love of what was done. But he had persuaded all of his loyalty and, though not in their secret coun sels, was yet, by his knowledge of their dispositions within the castle, able to lay bare before us the very heart of their devices. And here, in brief, is his story;

Below the level of the ground in the castle, approached by a flight of stone steps which abutted on the end of the drawbridge, were situate two small rooms, cut out of the rock itself. The outer of the two had no windows, but was always lighted with candles; the inner had one square window, which gave upon the moat. In this inner room there lay always, day and night. three of the Six, and the instructions of Duke Michael were that on any attack being made on the outer room the three were to defend the door of it so long as they could without risk to themselves. But so soon as the door should be in danger of being forced then Rupert Hentzau or Detchard (for should leave the others to hold it as long as they could and himself pass into the inner room and without more ado kill the king, who lay there, well treated, indeed, but without weapons and with his arms confined in fine steel chains, which did not allow him to move his elbow more than three inches from his shoulder. Thus be fore the outer door were stormed the king would be dead. And his body? For his body would be evidence as damning as himself.

"Nay, sir," said Johann, "his high-

ness has thought of that. While the two hold the outer room the one who has killed the king unlocks the bars in the square window (they turn on a hinge). The window now gives no light, for its mouth is choked by a great pipe of earthenware, and this pipe, which is large enough to let pass through it the body of a man, passes into the most, coming to an end immediately above the surface of the water, so that there is no perceptible interval between water and pipe. The king being dead, his murderer swiftly tles a weight to the body and, dragging it to the window, raises it by a pulley (for lest the weight should prove too great Detchard has provided one) till it is level with the mouth of the pipe. He inserts the feet in the pipe and pushes the body down. Silently, without splash or sound, it falls into the water and thence to the bottom of the moat, which is twenty feet deep thereabouts. This done, the murderer cries loudly, 'All's well!' and himself slides down the pipe; and the others, if they can and the attack is not too hot, run to the inner room and, seeking a moment's delay, bar the door and in their turn slide down. And though the king rises not from the bottom, they called to a groom to bring him his rise and swim round to the other side, where the orders are for men to wait them with ropes, to haul them out, and horses. And here, if things go ill, the duke will join them and seek safety as though to mount. Then he suddenly turned to me, his left hand resting on by riding; but if all goes well they will return to the castle and have their enemies in a trap. That, sir, is the plan of his highness for the disposal of the king in case of need. But it is not to be used till the last, for, as we all know, he is not minded to kill the king unless he can, before or soon after, kill you also, sir. Now, sir. I have my heart. With a cry I staggered back. spoken the truth, as God is my witness, and I pray you to shield me from upon his horse and was off like an ar- the vengeance of Duke Michael; for if, tow, pursued by cries and revolver after he knows what I have done, I shots—the last as useless as the first—fall into his hands I shall pray for one thing out of all the world-a speedy fusely, as I watched the devil's brat death, and that I shall not obtain from

disappear down the long avenue. My him!" The fellow's story was rudely told. fainted.

I suppose that I was put to bed and narrative. What he had told us appicions were aroused and there came I awoke to my full mind and found stance, as I, the king, could bring—the Fritz beside me. I was weak and CONTINUED ON SIXTH PAGE.